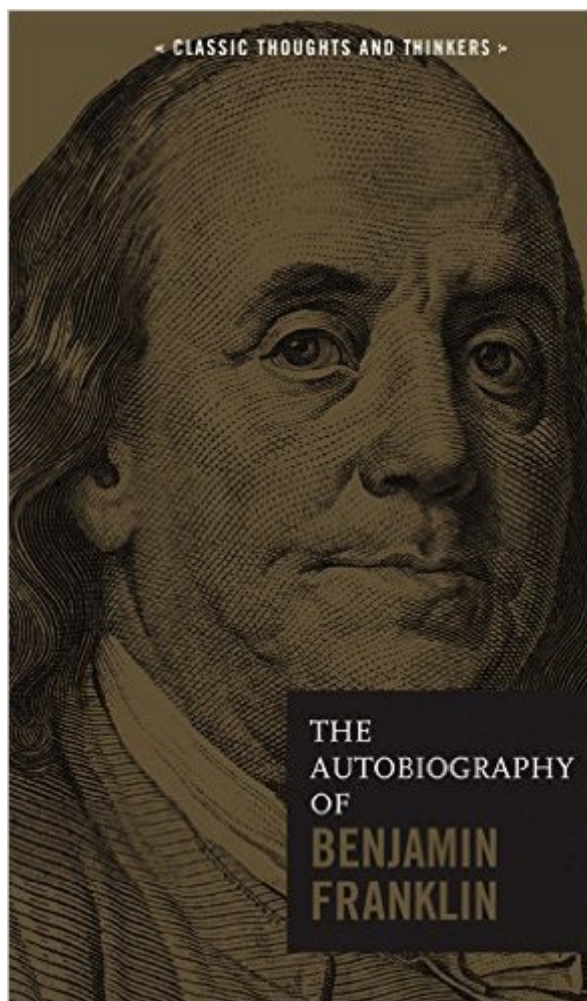


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The Autobiography Of Benjamin Franklin



Synopsis

The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin is the unfinished record of Benjamin Franklin's life written by Franklin himself and is one of the most influential examples of an autobiography ever written. Franklin's account of his life is divided into four parts, reflecting the different periods at which he wrote them. The first publication of The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin, Part One, was published in Paris, in French in 1791. It wasn't until 1818 that the full version of Franklin's autobiography was published by his grandson, William Temple Franklin, who did not include Part Four because he has previously traded away the original holograph of the Autobiography for a copy that contained only the first three parts. In addition, Franklin's grandson felt free to make stylistic revisions to his grandfather's autobiography. W.T. Franklin's text was the standard version of the Autobiography for half a century, until John Bigelow purchased the original manuscript in France and in 1868 published the most reliable text that had yet appeared, including the first English publication of Part Four. This edition of Autobiography of Ben Franklin comes from the original manuscript of Ben Franklin's Memoirs and is presented in its entirety for enjoyment by all English speakers.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

It's a little presumptuous to write a "review" of a book as historically important as this, so I'll just give a few reasons why you should read it. It's well-written and engaging, even 200+ (nearing 300+; Franklin was born in 1706) years later. It stops in 1760, well before his involvement with the

Revolution, but it covers in detail his youth, apprenticeships, the formation of his philosophy and ideals, and his path from poor roots to business and social success -- the first telling of the American Dream, the idea that a poor young man could Find His Fortune in the New World through enterprise, wisdom, and work. There is a high degree of self-hagiography here, and it would be amusing to tally up (for example) how many times Franklin praises himself vs. how many times he advises on the virtue of humility. He smooths over controversial topics like his illegitimate son, he doesn't mention his membership in the Freemasons, etc. The construction is also a bit rambling ("Then I did this thing. Next, I did another thing. Then I did a third thing"), but Franklin simply did so many interesting things -- even in this short slice of his life -- that the book is interesting despite that. There's a great deal of discussion on his scientific and inventive accomplishments, and he talks at length about his development of his own personal moral code and how he achieved business success (along with Franklin's Personal Method You Can Use for Self-Improvement -- in some ways, this is the first self-help book!) All in all, this is very much worth reading, and gives a compelling picture of Franklin's life and times. I particularly liked the picture Franklin draws of contemporary American society -- free, open, and small, with most people in most towns all knowing each other, and business opportunities are wide open for anyone with industry and pluck. I'm not sure how similar modern-day America still is to Franklin's Philadelphia, but it's certain that Franklin -- and this book -- helped set the image that we still *want* to believe America conforms to. And for that alone, it's worth reading. If you like this book, you might also be interested in reading Alexis de Tocqueville's *Democracy in America*, for another view of colonial-era America, or any of Mark Twain's nonfiction (*Life on the Mississippi*, *Roughing It*, etc.), for similar accounts of America's growth and development a hundred-odd years further on. Any of those should be available as a free Kindle download.

This "Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin" does not contain the type of finished material one has come to expect in a finished coherent autobiographical writing covering the whole life span of the individual written by single author over a continuous period of time. This is really source material partially written over distinctly separate periods of time wherein the author, Benjamin Franklin, wrote on two different continents without access to the other parts of his text. With that said, I still think that this book is a wonderful and enlightening piece of work. It should, in my opinion, be considered for placement in every high school and college library, and it should perhaps be wise to consider it for required reading in those institutions. The book tells of the life and times in which Mr. Franklin lived, the attitudes of the colonists and of the British and the ways that things were accomplished in

colonial America. It is truly amazing to me to hear first hand how a single individual with only two years of formal education can educate himself as this man did and to rise to make such truly great contributions to society, science, engineering, and politics. I highly recommend this book.

Franklin wrote this autobiography as a letter of instruction in the ways of the world to his youthful and illegitimate son of 40. It only covers the first half or so of his incredible life, so the things that really made him well-known are not covered, but there is plenty here anyway. Franklin recounts his family's modest life in England and the circumstances that brought them to Boston. He was among the youngest of a very large family, ultimately finding his way to Philadelphia to find work as a printer when an apprenticeship with an older brother turned sour. We always think of Franklin as being a slightly older statesman among the Founding Fathers, when in fact he was a full generation older than Washington or Jefferson. Unlike popular perception, he was an athletic and vibrant youth, who rescued a drowning Dutch companion and taught swimming to children of London's elite. Philadelphia in the 1720's and 1730's was a small town, never sure if it would really take off as a settlement. Franklin quickly befriended key politicians who felt Philadelphia had grown sufficiently to have a world-class print shop. He played a key role in the town's development, leading civic groups in establishing libraries, fire companies, meeting halls, and street cleaning services. Of course, he was also the consummate politician, serving in office, and networking his way to his first fortune by publishing government documents and printing the first paper currency. He also had a knack for working with the several important religious sects of that time and place, especially the pacifist Quakers, even though Franklin was a deist. Franklin was a clever businessman. In today's lexicon, he effectively franchised across the colonies his concept of the publisher/printer who would provide both the content and the ink on paper. By age 30, he had set up his business affairs so that his printing businesses in several colonies were operated by partners and he received a share of the profits, allowing him to pursue other interests. The autobiography is unfinished, so we don't hear his account of his pursuits of electricity, which made him as famous and well-known as Bill Gates is today, nor his thought on the Revolution. Franklin did play a key role in establishing logistical support to the British during their fight with the French in the New World. At that time and during his years in Europe, he was generally perceived as a Tory supporter. Read this book to learn how Franklin devoted himself to self-improvement by establishing clubs, lending libraries, a sober lifestyle allowing time for study, and his methods for measuring his personal performance against metrics he had established for a proper lifestyle. One will also gather a new appreciation for the fullness, utility, and richness of the English language when put on paper by a master.

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